



Tips for Adapting Service-Learning & Community-Engaged Assignments

Due to the unprecedented shifts in higher education created by the COVID-19 pandemic, UAA faculty are tasked with teaching the remainder of the semester using alternate delivery methods. The Center for Community Engagement & Learning (CCEL) can help provide specialized guidance on adapting service-learning/community-engaged (SL/CE) assignments. Some general considerations for adapting SL/CE assignments are provided below. For additional support, consultations can be scheduled with Donna Aguiniga, CCEL's Interim Director, at dmaguiniga@alaska.edu.

Communicate with community sites

Reach out to the community site and let them know that changes will likely have to be made regarding student involvement due to alternate instructional delivery methods and the call to limit the size of gatherings. Ask the site about their current status and what challenges they are experiencing that would impact student communication with them. Be frank about the need for flexibility and realistic expectations.

Assess student progress towards achieving student learning objectives (SLOs) related to SL/CE projects

Remember that the educational benefit students receive from participation in SL/CE projects is not a specified end product or the completion of a set number of hours. Learning occurs throughout the project's duration, as students struggle with new concepts, are exposed to new ideas and experiences, and make meaning through reflective exercises. Based upon your assessment of student learning, it may be that students have achieved the primary objectives from their progress in the SL/CE project up to this point. If that is the case, a final reflection activity may serve to help you conclude the project.

Ex. The service-learning project may have required students to complete 20 hours with a local agency. If students have completed more than half of their hours, you may decide that related SLOs have been met.

Student learning can be demonstrated through adaptation to new circumstances

Students can learn valuable skills and knowledge by adapting to the unforeseen circumstances. Talk with students about the challenges of shifting to an online environment to complete tasks and highlight that these challenges are currently being faced by professionals in their fields. Help students brainstorm how projects can be modified and/or completed and demonstrate flexibility by allowing students to shift aspects of their projects.

Ex. Students creating a concert fundraiser to benefit a local non-profit could research how to host an online concert. This would entail research and/or coordination with musicians, the non-profit agency, a donation site, and a hosting site among others. Even if hosting the concert is not feasible during the remaining time in the semester, the students can document their findings and share them with the SL/CE site.

Alternate assignments can be tailored to reflect progress towards SL/CE assignment completion

If students have completed a varying amount of work towards the SL/CE assignment, consider creating some stepped alternate assignments. This will recognize student progress for those students who have worked on the SL/CE assignment, while still providing an avenue for students to achieve the SLOs and earn the associated points. Be cautious about having too many steps, as this may create confusion for students and unnecessarily increase the difficulty in creating and grading alternate assignments for faculty.

Ex. If students were originally required to complete 20 hours and write a final summary & reflection paper, one possibility (if SLOs and their associated assignments allow) could be:

- 10-20 hours completed – final reflection paper due + faculty member designates one assignment that students in this group do not have to complete
- 3-9 hours completed – final reflection paper due + no changes in other assignments due
- 0-2 hours – completes remaining assignments + alternate assignment created by faculty

Consider eliminating SL/CE assignment

If the SL/CE assignment is in its initial stages or has not yet begun, considering eliminating it from the course requirements for the semester. The public health impact of COVID-19 has impacted the ability of people to meet freely within the community and community partners are dealing with their own priorities. Consider how other assignments help students meet the SLOs. If necessary to meet SLOs, substitute in a non-SL/CE assignment. Be mindful of the challenges students will have completing the course and do not create additional assignments if they can be avoided.

Learn from students

While this semester will require faculty to adapt SL/CE assignments, take the opportunity to learn from your students about what worked, what challenges they experienced, and their recommendations to improve future SL/CE projects that may need to take place using an online or alternate delivery format. Student feedback about SL/CE can help prepare you and UAA to better respond to future situations and ensure instructional continuity.

For additional instructional guidance, please visit the [Center for Advancing Faculty Excellence](#) (CAFÉ) and [Academic Innovation & eLearning](#) (AI&e). These centers can assist with helping you consider new instructional delivery and assessment format and technologies.